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SUBJECT: USUNESCO: INTERNATIONAL OCEANOGRAPHIC
COMMISSION (IOC) PREVIEWS CAPACITY BUILDING SCHEME IN
ADVANCE OF JUNE ASSEMBLY MEETING

Reftel: Paris 60390

1. Summary: In the run-up to the June 21-29 IOC Assembly, IOC Executive Secretary Patricio Bernal and Capacity Building Unit Chief Erlich Desa outlined the IOC's capacity building program for permanent delegations to UNESCO. The DCM and the Science Officer of the US Mission attended one in a series of meetings in which Bernal and Desa presented a slate of activities designed to raise awareness among decision-makers in developing countries via training and conferences. They acknowledged a focus on coastal development issues, in response to expressed regional needs. Desa stressed that the upcoming IOC Assembly will be key in shaping the orientation and work plan of his newly established unit. Comment: One issue to explore is the need for the capacity building unit to work in concert with the IOC's other divisions in order to bring value to key IOC activities. End Summary and Comment.

2. US Permanent Delegation DCM and Science Officer attended a June 16 meeting on the IOC's capacity building program organized by IOC Executive Secretary Patricio Bernal for permanent delegations. The meeting -- billed as preparatory to the IOC Assembly -- was the third in a series in which Bernal and capacity building unit chief Desa briefed member states on what the capacity building program has to offer and how member states could contribute. The June 16 meeting included representatives from developed countries, and representatives from Germany, Finland, Canada, and Japan also participated.

3. In his introduction, Patricio Bernal said that the capacity building unit represented the rebirth and strengthening of an old IOC program designed to encourage training, education, mutual assistance. He evoked an urgent need -- "we are losing the battle to maintain the health of the oceans" -- requiring "science-based" solutions. To that end, it is necessary to enhance capacity in developing countries, including the use of the most advanced tools -- satellite observations, operational data and models -- for safe and sustainable coastal development. Bernal reported that the IOC had conducted needs assessment via workshops in conjunction with its regional bodies. The Commission also worked with a consultant to identify best practices; this highlighted the importance of strengthening research institutions, ensuring long-term support via national policies, and developing indigenous fund raising skills. Bernal stressed the importance of performance indicators, to include: overall IOC performance in capacity building (growth in resources, new collaborations, approval of member states, performance of secretariat); regional performance (development of products addressing regional needs, attracting sustained support); and program performance (goals attained, publications, positive evaluations from participants); and sponsors (long-term support).

4. In what was billed as the "take away" sequence, Desa presented a slate of activities for which he requested support from member states. These included:

- an assessment of baseline capacity
- leadership programs for directors of research institutions
- proposal writing workshops
- team building activities for scientists, particularly at the regional level
- hiring a consultant to explore means of working with potential sponsors
- secondments to the Capacity building section
- activities to "model what-if scenarios" to decision-makers
- a "witnessing leadership" program: activities similar to POGO to build ties between directors of research institutions in the developed and the developing world

-- an "eminent visiting researchers" program

-- a "summer school" for decision makers

Desa explained that these activities were meant to build upon existing programs, including those in integrated coastal management financed by the World Bank.

15. In response to questions from the U.S. representatives, Desa explained that:

-- Since the unit's inception, its work has focused on the process of regional consultations, and the development of the slate of activities outlined above. He said that the slate of activities had been derived from an overall strategy, but he did not brief on this strategy.

-- regional consultations resulted in a focus on issues relating to coastal development.

-- Funding for the slate of activities would in fact be "seed money" used to raise awareness among scientists, chiefs of research institutions and policymakers. The goal of the activities is to achieve "buy in" by policymakers. It would then be up to local partners to raise funds for implementation.

16. A representative of Germany expressed concern that the program might result in further studies and conferences by scientists with no long-term impact. Desa explained that a key component of the plan was the involvement of decision makers who could devise and implement new policies; he described this as "a change process." The German representative also asked what role the capacity building unit might play in disaster reduction. In a subsequent conversation, the German representative said that he would send a letter to Bernal and Desa asking him to clarify the role of the capacity building unit in the area of disaster reduction, with an eye to studying whether the unit's work might merit inclusion in a project that the German government envisions to identify concrete actions that would prevent future tragedies. More broadly, he confessed to having been "confused" by the "disconnect" between Bernal's opening presentation and the slate of activities outlined by Desa.

17. A representative from a Nordic country asked whether it might make sense to rethink the format of the IOC Assembly -- which he described as overly detail-oriented and "boring" -- in order to encourage the participation of decision makers. Desa agreed that including more decision makers in the Assembly might be a good idea. He said that he thought the reaction of member states at the upcoming Assembly would be key in determining the direction of the capacity building program. He said that he would present the slate of activities outlined above to the Assembly, expressing the hope for more than a "rubber stamp." He noted later to science officer that he has in the past particularly appreciated the detailed input of the U.S. delegation to the planning process.

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